A Fine Novel, Indicting Mars

HERE in *The Secret Battle* is one of the few essential books on war. Not on this war particularly. For though Gallipoli and the Somme are vivid horrors on the page, the background might as well be the blood soaked shore of Troy or the field of Waterloo or any battle plain of the future where men will strive. For this secret battle is a man's "lonely conflict with himself, a conflict more terrible and exacting than any battle." And until we are perfected in individual strength beyond the reach of a present imagination, the struggle will go on. Strength and weakness are always at war in a man's nature. And Harry Penrose shows clearly that the more highly developed, the more imaginative he is, the more reason to wonder what will happen to nerve and spirit under great, brutalizing periods of horror.

This Harry Penrose is a young Englishman of twenty-one, an orphan, of the upper middle class, who has finished his second year at Oxford, enlisted in the ranks for the discipline of it instead of applying for a commission, but has risen to officer's rank. He goes out to Gallipoli under the officer who tells the story, is finally invalided home, marries, goes to France though he has an offer to stay in England and—but the ending must be left to the reader. That ending is tragic. The author frankly says so at once. Yet every step in the development of the story is as enthralling as if we had never guessed what the end would be.

But the terror, the horror, the pity, and the hideous waste of it! Here is a young man, the fine flower of many civilizing generations of men, who has one weak spot in his nature, the fear that he will not be brave in a crisis. Facing it gallantly, recognizing it and its danger clearly, he begins his battle with it. He seeks opportunities to test himself, and comes through them worn but still master. He endures, with many shocks but without failing himself, all the ghastly things that are forever linked with the name of Gallipoli.

"No man who had a bad time in that place ever 'got over it' in body or soul, and when France or some other campaign began to work upon them, it was seen that there was something missing in their resisting power; they broke out with old diseases and old fears . . . the legacies of Gallipoli."

No man would put either a beast or machine to the same gruelling, breaking tests as those which he expects his own infinitely more delicate mechanism to bear. The gradual disintegration of this brave man's morale under practically incessant strain is told with much of the gripping force of an old Greek tragedy. And still, still he might have conquered even against such odds, if he hadn't had to fight as well the malice and cruelty of Col. Philpott, who puts him to impossible tests, and the final bitter venom with which "Bogus" Burnett writes doom across his struggling spirit.

Many will no doubt refuse to harrow their souls with a tragedy like this, preferring to put behind them entirely the war now so happily over. Those who do read will experience the thrill, like no other in the world, of discovering real power. Here are the qualities that can make the great novelist Imagination, insight, quick, sure characterization, the capacity to understand the hidden processes of men's souls and to reveal them to others. And with it all an evidently inborn literary style, and "the incommunicable gift of phrase." It is difficult to believe that this is a first book, for through all this power there is a reticence, a restraint, and a sense of force in leash which is usually the result of a highly tempered experience.

Out of the myriad pictures of war this has a terrible, unforgettable simplicity. One would like to quote whole pages, not merely for those snatches of beauty which even war cannot wholly torture out of existence, but for the poignant description of men struggling to be greater than themselves. There is none of the piling of horror upon horror that made Barbusse's *Le Feu* almost impossible to read. Here there is almost understatement, an air of quiet acceptance of the unbearable, and an equal resolution not to dress up the ancient horrors and pretend that war is glorious. Man is glorious in it, but not in the trite old romantic warrior sense. Mr. Herbert refrains with an amazing restraint from condemnation or suggestion. He lets the things that men have done speak for themselves. But through him with what a voice they cry to heaven!

M. P. A.

THE SECRET BATTLE. By A. P. Herbert. Alfred A. Knopf.

Dr. Cram on Progress

TO some of us the three addresses that Dr. Ralph Adams Cram publishes in *Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh*, will appear eloquent and satisfactory. As for the rest of us, who come back from church to seek in Sunday editorials some hint of what is the matter with the world, his exhortation to return to the philosophy of the Middle Ages, which he defines no more explicitly than as "a synthesis of antecedent philosophies, Neo-platonic, Jewish, Arabian, Byzantine, Patristic, Peripatetic, Socratic, purged of their alien elements, gathered into an organic unity and vitalized by the Catholic religion," leaves us only conscious of how many courses there were at college we didn't take.

Without debating Dr. Cram's discussion of monasticism and sacramental philosophy, his condemnation of modernity so severely and arbitrarily dismisses every phase of the last 500 years development that his position becomes individual, apart, and beyond argument. When he said in 1918 that "The boasted barriers against war and dissolution erected one behind the other by finance, capitalism, a socialistic and organized proletariat, universal education, popular government, intellectual and spiritual emancipation, broke, toppled," &c., he included in one classification such divergent activities that the man in the street at least puts aside the book as one simply not meant for him, but written in the language of a very special people.

Perhaps this is no fair comment to make on the book, for the addresses were given to churchmen, who it was expected would come half way to meet the lecturer with information and sympathy, but the book has a preface suggesting that here is some suggested solution for the world after the war reconstruction, and such a proffering invites every human being's speculation. And in this case some of the invited are threatened with a disappointment.

J. C. M.

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH. By Ralph Adams Cram. Boston: Marshall Jones Company.

"INDIVIDUALS," observed Mme. Bernhardt in her autobiography published by Appleton, "who are kind, intelligent and compassionate, become less so when they are together." Mme. Bernhardt's observation is rather sweeping. Consider Robinson Crusoe. He was as kind, intelligent and compassionate as could be. But he didn't have much chance to show it until his man Friday appeared

Russia From a Car Window

"TWO motives led me to Russia in the fall of 1917," writes Oliver M. Sayler in his preface to *Russia White or Red;* "the desire to study at first hand the most important theatre of our time before the pressure of revolution should bear too harshly upon it, and the impulse to be in the most uncertain and interesting and eventful place in the world." Therefore this writer, by occupation dramatic critic of an Indiana newspaper, went to Moscow by way of Siberia and lived there for most of his six months stay, except for a brief visit to Petrograd and Volgoda.

After reading so admirable a work as Prof. Ross's *Russia in Upheaval*, which was written from the results of a visit to Russia at the same time, Mr. Sayler's book is something of a disappointment. In the one case we had the production of a trained observer, a distinguished sociologist and a trenchant writer—with a great capacity for acquiring information. In Mr. Sayler we have a sentimeantal optimist with a strong, natural disposition to see the best of everything in the Russian revolutionary movement, a narrow viewpoint, and but limited observation confined to a very small portion of the greatest country in the world. Moreover, he is given to careless statements, as in the instance of stating that since August, 1918, not a single correspondent has been in Petrograd or Moscow, although we know through *Russia in 1919*, that its author spent three months in those cities in the beginning of this year.

He qualifies this by saying "no correspondent of an English or American newspaper" has been there "with the exception of a flying visit on the part of two or three." He also repeats the charge made originally by Charles Edward Russell that "our 'news' to-day is the deliberately colored propaganda picked up from the Russian Government wireless." We confess to growing impatient over the implication that all the newspapers of America can be gulled all the time in this fashion about Russia.

As to Mr. Sayler's tendency toward seeing the best of everything in the Russian revolutionary movement, we may cite his comment that Trotzky's grossly impertinent reply to President Wilson's message to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets was "an able reply, a dignified reply, a reply even breathing certain social ideals."

On the last page of the book this writer tells of trying to get Prof. Ross to give him "his views on the Russian outlook" in Moscow in November, 1917. Finally Ross said to the importunate Sayler: "For the last three years there has been no surer way to make a fool of one's self than to predict something about Russia." In spite of this Sayler makes this important contribution to just such prophecy:

"Whatever the solution [of the Russian problem] may be, it will fulfil the peculiar needs of Russian life and the Russian temper. From the ordeal of hunger and terror a great people will emerge chastened. And as the honest, unfettered expression of the world's richest physical and spiritual storehouse, the Russian State will be big with significance for the human race."

W. B. M'C.

RUSSIA WHITE OR RED. By Oliver M. Sayler. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

The World's His Armchair

MR. SHERLOCK BRONSON GASS in the series of essays which he calls *A Lover of the Chair* cannot be said to have furnished a striking illustration of the maxim that ideas and not phrases are after all the backbone of that particular form of literature. It is difficult (not to say impossible) to imagine the late O. Henry referring to Mr. Gass as "My bully good pal," as was his habit in referring to Montaigne..

Mr. Gass's lover, rejected distressfully by the object of his affections in Chapter I., presently reaches the admirable but not entirely original conclusion that he should deport himself with as much fortitude as possible. Well and good. But had the young woman realized the hitherto dormant literary bent that her refusal was to awaken there might have been a different story to tell. The lover straightway begins philosophizing upon the intellectual and artistic aspects of life from the point of view of the man who sits among his books and dreams—and who, perhaps, misses much that a rougher and more vigorous contact with the world would have afforded him.

There are times when Mr. Gass emerges temporarily from the copse of words in which he chooses to ambush himself through the greater part of the 303 pages. On such occasions one gets fleeting glimpses of a man of broad sympathies and kindly nature who should find much more in life to interest him than attempting to extract ingrowing thoughts without first turning on the electric light and providing himself with a pair of mental tweezers.

H. A. F.

A LOVER OF THE CHAIR. By Sherlock Bronson Gass. Boston: Marshall Jones Company.